

BOREHOLE TELEMETRY SYSTEM

The present invention generally relates to an apparatus and a method for communicating parameters relating to down-hole 5 conditions to the surface. More specifically, it pertains to such an apparatus and method for acoustic communication.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

One of the more difficult problems associated with any 10 borehole is to communicate measured data between one or more locations down a borehole and the surface, or between down-hole locations themselves. For example, communication is desired by the oil industry to retrieve, at the surface, data generated down-hole during operations such as 15 perforating, fracturing, and drill stem or well testing; and during production operations such as reservoir evaluation testing, pressure and temperature monitoring. Communication is also desired to transmit intelligence from the surface to down-hole tools or instruments to effect, control or modify 20 operations or parameters.

Accurate and reliable down-hole communication is particularly important when complex data comprising a set of measurements or instructions is to be communicated, i.e., 25 when more than a single measurement or a simple trigger signal has to be communicated. For the transmission of complex data it is often desirable to communicate encoded digital signals.

30 One approach which has been widely considered for borehole communication is to use a direct wire connection between the surface and the down-hole location(s). Communication then

can be made by wire-bound electrical signals. While much effort has been spent on "wireline" communication, its inherent high telemetry rate is not always needed and very often does not justify its high cost.

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Another borehole communication technique that has been explored is the transmission of acoustic waves. Whereas in some cases the pipes and tubulars within the well can be used to transmit acoustic waves, commercially available 10 systems utilize the various liquids within a borehole as the transmission medium.

Among those techniques that use liquids as medium are the well-established Measurement-While-Drilling or MWD 15 techniques. A common element of the MWD and related methods is the use of a flowing medium, e.g., the drilling fluids pumped during the drilling operation. This requirement however prevents the use of MWD techniques in operations during which a flowing medium is not available.

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In recognition of this limitation various systems of acoustic transmission in a liquid independent of movement have been put forward, for example in the US Pat. Nos. 3,659,259; 3,964,556; 5,283,768 or 6,442,105. However none 25 of these techniques are successfully applied to monitor borehole parameters and transmit data to the surface during production enhancing operation such as fracturing.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to 30 provide an acoustic communication system that overcomes the limitations of existing devices to allow the communication of data between a down-hole location and a surface location.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with a first aspect of the invention, there is provided an acoustic telemetry apparatus for communicating digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to the surface or between locations within the borehole. The apparatus includes a receiver and a transmitter linked by an acoustic channel wherein the acoustic channel has a cross-sectional area of 58 cm² or less and the transmitter 5 comprises an electro-active transducer generating a modulated continuous waveform. 10

The acoustic channel preferably provides a low loss liquid medium for pressure wave propagation between the transmitter 15 and the receiver.

The use of active down-hole sources for the purpose transmitting measured data to a surface location has been hampered in the past by the fact that the amount of energy 20 required to successfully operate the source is relatively large. In most case it exceeds the energy that can be stored in batteries, capacitors and the like to the extent that these sources are suitable for use in the harsh and spatially restricted environment of a typical subterranean 25 hydrocarbon reservoir.

The power needed to generate a pressure wave of required amplitude is given by

30 [1]
$$\Delta P = (\rho c^2) \Delta V / V$$

where ρ is the density of the acoustic medium and c the

speed of sound, V is the volume of the acoustic medium and ΔV is the variation of volume necessary to generate the pressure increment ΔP . Equation 1 means that for a large volume V , a large volume change ΔV is required to generate 5 an appropriate pressure perturbation ΔP . In turn generating a large ΔV means that a large power source is needed. In cases where the liquid volume is large, i.e., when the whole annulus between a work string and the casing is used as the telemetry channel, the power drain on a down-hole source is 10 considerable. For example for an annulus formed by a 7" casing (0.16m inner diameter) and 3.5" tubing (0.09m outer diameter), a 30Hz piston source with a displacement of 1mm (2mm peak-to-peak) can generate a wave amplitude of about 3 bar with an acoustic power of around 270W. Assuming a source 15 efficiency of 0.5, then an electrical power of 540W is required down-hole. This makes a battery powered down-hole source generally impractical.

The present example therefore makes use of acoustic channels 20 with a small volume and, hence, a small cross-sectional area. This approach is however difficult as the attenuation in a tubular acoustic medium depends partly on its radius:

$$[2] \quad \alpha = (\mu \omega / (2\rho))^{0.5} / (c r)$$

25 where μ is the viscosity of the liquid, ω the angular frequency and r the inner radius of the tube. Given the wave frequency and the physical properties of the fluid, the tube radius r determines the signal attenuation. For 30 communication through thin tubes, as proposed herein, the α value is large and the proper size of the tubes to be used

as an acoustic channel is a matter of careful consideration and selection to avoid total loss of the signal before it reaches the surface location.

5 The new system allows communication of encoded data that may contain the results of more than one or two different types of measurements, such as pressure and temperature.

10 The cross-sectional diameter of the acoustic channel is 58 cm² or less, corresponding to a 3 inch (7.5 cm) diameter. More preferably, the cross-sectional diameter of the acoustic channel is 25 cm² or less corresponding to a 2 inch (5.64 cm) diameter.

15 The acoustic channel used for the present invention is preferably a continuous liquid-filled channel. Often it is preferable to use a low-loss acoustic medium, thus excluding the usual borehole fluids that are often highly viscous. Preferable media include liquids with viscosity of less than 20 3×10⁻³ NS/m², such as water and light oils.

25 The acoustic channel may be implemented using a small-diameter continuous string of pipe, such as coiled tubing, lowered into the borehole prior to an intended well operation or, alternatively, by making use of permanently or quasi-permanently installed facilities such as hydraulic power lines.

30 In a preferred variant the apparatus may include an acoustic receiver at the down-hole location thus enabling a two-way communication.

The receiver of the telemetry system preferably includes signal processing means designed to filter the reflected wave signals or other noise from the upwards traveling modulated wave signals.

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In a preferred embodiment the carrier waveform (the waveform before data modulation) is a single frequency sine wave or at least a narrow-band wave with 90% of the energy falling within boundaries defined by +/- 10 percent deviation from the nominal center frequency. The waveform is preferably a sinusoidal wave. The nominal frequency of the waveform may range from 0.1Hz to 100 Hz, depending upon the data rate requirement, the size of the liquid filled wave-guide tube, depth, and other parameters. For stimulation applications the frequency range may cover 1 to 100 Hz, preferably 1 to 10Hz.

The generator of the waveform is an efficient electro-mechanical or, more specifically an electro-dynamic transducer comprising electromagnetic coils or an electro-acoustic transducer or actuator comprising electro-active material, such as piezoelectric material, electro- or magneto-strictive material. The transducer may take the form of a stack of piezoelectric elements and may be combined with suitable mechanical amplifiers to increase the effective displacement of the actuator system.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of communicating digital data through a borehole employing the steps of establishing a column of liquid as acoustic channel through said borehole, said column having a cross-sectional area of 58 cm² or less;

generating at the down-hole location an acoustic wave carrier signal within said acoustic channel using an electro-active transducer; modulating amplitude and/or phase of said carrier wave in response to a digital signal; and
5 detecting at the surface the modulated acoustic waves traveling within said acoustic channel.

In a preferred variant of the inventive method, the acoustic channel is established by lowering a liquid-filled coiled
10 tubing string of the appropriate diameter of 3 inch or less, preferably 2.5 inch or less, or even 2 inch or less into the borehole.

Further aspects of the invention include the use of the
15 above apparatus and methods in a well stimulation operation, such as fracturing or acidizing.

These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of non-limitative
20 examples and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGs. 1A,B illustrate elements of an acoustic telemetry system in accordance with an example of the
25 invention using coiled tubing as acoustic channel;

Fig. 2 shows elements of an alternative embodiment of the novel telemetry system using a hydraulic power line as acoustic channel;

30 FIGs. 3A,B show simulated signal power and power loss spectra: and

FIG. 4 is a flows diagram illustrating steps of a well stimulation method in accordance with the invention.

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EXAMPLES

A first example of the invention is shown in FIG.1A which depicts an example of the novel telemetry system in a well 100 during a well stimulation operation.

10 Prior to performing the stimulation, a down-hole measurement and telemetry sub 120 is mounted on a coiled tubing 110 to be positioned below perforations 101.

15 Coiled tubing system 110 includes a tubing reel 111 and a tubing feeder 112, which is mounted on a support frame 113. Feeder 112 pushes the tubing into well 100 through a well head 102, which is part of the surface installation. The surface end of coiled tubing 110 is connected to a liquid pump 114 through an instrumented pipe section 113, on which 20 a number of pressure/acoustic transducers 115, 116 are mounted.

25 Down-hole measurement and telemetry sub 120 which is shown in more detail in FIG. 1B includes a measurement unit 121 with various sensors 122 for recording down-hole pressure and temperature. It further includes a power supply unit 123 with batteries to provide power to the operation of the sub and further electronic circuits to condition and digitize any analog signal. A power modulator 124 encodes measured 30 data into a modulated voltage signal carrying the digitized data for driving a pressure/acoustic wave source 130 through a cable 125.

Source 130 is an electro-mechanical transducer that converts an electrical driving power (voltage or current) into a mechanical displacement. It includes a piezoelectric stack 5 131 protected by a housing 132, an inner flow-through tube 133, pressure transparent membrane 134 and protection fluid (electrically insulating) 135.

The liquid flow through sub 120 is controlled by two valves 10 125, 126 and the associated driving systems 127, 128. Valve 125 is a sliding or rotating sleeve valve, which is installed above source 130. Its driving unit 127 is linked to electronics/sensor unit 121. Valve 126 is shown to be a full bore solenoid flow-through valve, which is installed 15 below the sub.

Valves 125, 126 are operated so as to enable pumping cleaning fluid through coiled tubing 110 to clean up unwanted materials such as proppants after a stimulation 20 operation. Additionally, valves 125, 126 facilitate filling up and pressurizing coiled tubing 110 with liquid, so that the attenuating effect of air trapped in the tubing is minimized and the channel established by the liquid in coiled tubing 110 is suitable for acoustic wave 25 transmission.

Before a stimulation, liquid pump 114 pumps a low viscosity fluid such as water through coiled tubing 110 to fill it up, and pressurizing it to an appropriate pressure by continuing 30 pumping after closing the down-hole valve 126.

During the stimulation operation, the stimulation fluid is

pumped into the cased well bore 100 from a well head entry 103. The fluids flow into the formation through the perforations 101 above measurement/telemetry sub 120 deployed by coiled tubing 110. A blast joint (not shown) is 5 mounted where the stimulation fluid first meets the coiled tubing to protect the coiled tubing from erosion. The down-hole measurement/telemetry sub 120 starts to record pressure, temperature and other data after the stimulation process begins. The data is then converted to a binary code, 10 which modulates a sinusoidal or pulse voltage with one or a combination of the following modulation schemes: frequency shift keying (FSK), phase shift keying (PSK), amplitude shift keying (ASK) or various pulse modulation methods, e.g. pulse width or pulse position modulation.

15 In the example, modulation of sinusoidal waves with a digital method such as FSK or PSK is used. The modulated electrical signal is converted to a pressure/acoustic wave of same modulation by the down-hole electro-mechanical 20 source 130.

The wave is detected by at least one, or more, 25 pressure/acoustic transducers 115, 116 on the surface. The transducers are spatially separated by more than 1/8 of wavelength of the carrier wave. The spatial separation allows to apply various known techniques to improve the reception of the signal in the presence of noise and interference as caused for example by reflected waves.

30 The telemetry system shown in FIG. 1 can be made bi-directional by installing a pressure/acoustic transducer in the down-hole sub, and a pressure/acoustic wave source on

surface.

The sensing element of the down-hole transducer is exposed only to the liquid inside the coiled tubing, and therefore
5 insensitive to the stimulation pressure outside the tubing. The surface source can be built similar to the design of the down-hole source, however the power required to operate it can be supplied from an external source.

- 10 To perform a surface to down-hole down communication, the surface source sends out a signal in a frequency band that is outside the frequency band of the upward telemetry. Therefore the two-way communication can be performed simultaneously without interfering with each other. A bi-
15 directional telemetry system is relevant if during the operation, the operational modes of down-hole devices, such as sampling rate, telemetry data rate, are to be altered. Other functions unrelated to altering measurement and telemetry modes may include opening or closing certain down-
20 hole valves or enable/disable the down-hole source.

Alternatively to the deployment on a coiled tubing the communication system of the present invention may be used in conjunction with hydraulic control lines. Modern wells are
25 often completed with production tubing, down-hole sensors for permanent monitoring and down-hole control devices such as valves. In such completions often at least one hydraulic control line is deployed with the production tubing. Provided the line has a diameter that renders it useful for
30 the application of the invention, e.g. with a 1/4 inch (nominal size of the inner diameter) diameter tubes, it can provide a channel for pressure signal communication between

a down-hole transmitter and a surface controller.

In normal practice of so-called "intelligent" completion, electrical cables are used to provide the communication link 5 between any down-hole sensors and surface data acquisition system. The cables also provide electrical power to the down-hole sensors. However as the installation of cables and pipes alongside the production tubing is difficult, a telemetry system based on a hydraulic line, as proposed 10 herein, can be advantageous as it alleviates the need to install additional electrical cables.

FIG. 2 shows an arrangement of a system utilizing a permanently installed hydraulic control line as an acoustic 15 telemetry channel for monitoring down-hole parameters of a producing well 200. FIG 2 illustrates schematically the side wall of well 200 along which a hydraulic line 210 linking a surface hydraulic controller 211 to a down-hole valve 220. To enable hydraulic pressure transmission , line 210 is 20 filled with a hydraulic liquid.

Operation commands, in the form of pressure signals, are generated on surface by controller 211 and transmitted to down-hole actuator/valve 220 via hydraulic control line 210. 25 Control line 210 can normally be deployed through various sealing devices in the annulus 201 between production tubing 202 and casing 203. The sealing devices may include a surface seal 204 and a number of down-hole packers 205.

30 Whereas the above-described parts of the installation are known per se, it is seen as a feature of this example of the invention that control line 210 is made hydraulically

accessible to a pressure wave source 230 based on an electro-mechanical device, such as a piston driven by a piezoelectric stack. In the present example, hydraulic access is provided by a T-type pipe joint 212. Pressure 5 source 230 is connected to a down-hole telemetry unit 231 via a cable 232. Measurement data from various down-hole sensors 233 can be sent to telemetry unit 231 via multiple cables (electrical or optical), or via a single cable that serves as a data bus. Telemetry unit 231 encodes the data 10 and provides a carrier signal wave with the appropriate modulation for transmission of the digital data, e.g. binary frequency or phase modulation. The unit 231 also provides power amplification to the modulated signal before the amplified signal is then applied to pressure wave source 15 230. The data-carrying pressure wave propagates through the liquid in hydraulic line 210 to the surface. One or more pressure transducers 213, 214 mounted on hydraulic line 210 detect the modulated carrier wave on the surface. A surface signal processor or demodulator 215 receives the pressure 20 signals from transducers 213, 214 and demodulates them to recover the transmitted data.

As in the previous example, the down-hole sensors and electronics for measurement and telemetry can be battery 25 powered. However in a permanent down-hole installation, the life span of a down-hole battery may not be sufficient for long term monitoring applications. In a variant of this example it is therefore proposed to generate electric power down-hole by using pressure waves generated on surface.

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As shown in FIG. 2, a pressure wave source 216, which may be a piezoelectric piston source driven by a sinusoidal wave

generated in an electrical power supply 217, is mounted on the surface section of the hydraulic control line via a T-type pipe junction 218. This source can generate pressure wave at frequencies higher than those generated by hydraulic controller 211. Several hundred Watts of acoustic power may be generated by surface source 216. Even after taking into consideration a propagation attenuation of several dB/kft, there will be 1-10 Watts acoustic power available down-hole at the end of a, for example, 10kft or 3300 meter borehole.

5 This acoustic power can be converted to electrical power by a piezoelectric converter 222, mounted on a down-hole section of hydraulic control line 210 via a T junction 219. The converted electrical current flows into an energy storage unit 223 via a cable 224. Storage unit 223, which

10 may be a capacitor bank, supplies electrical power to the down-hole sensors and to the telemetry unit 231.

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In a typical permanent monitoring operation, the frequency at which down-hole data are acquired and transmitted is low,

20 amounting to the transmission of a batch of data once or twice per hour. Therefore energy accumulated during the long idle intervals should be sufficient to power the down-hole devices during the infrequent active intervals.

Operations exists for which a single down-hole pressure

25 source 230 is sufficient for use as both, data transmitter to transmit measured data to the surface and electrical power converter for the acoustic power sent from surface.

The configuration of FIG. 2 also facilitates a two-way

30 telemetry system. In a two-way telemetry set-up surface source 216 is used to send down-link commands, in the form of digitally coded pressure waves, to down-hole devices, in

order to change their operation modes. Either single down-hole pressure source 230 or, alternatively, piezoelectric converter 222 may be used as down-hole receiving transducers. Appropriate signal-processing/demodulation 5 functions can be built into down-hole telemetry unit 231 to decode the commands.

To avoid cross-interferences between the hydraulic control system, the up-link telemetry system, the down-link 10 telemetry system and the power generation system, wave frequencies are separated. For instance, the frequency of the hydraulic control signal may be below 0.5 Hz, the up-link telemetry frequency may be between 1 Hz to 3 Hz, the down-link telemetry band may occupy the next frequency band 15 from 3 to 5 Hz and the power generation frequency may be around 7Hz. If these different systems can be operated at different time intervals, they may time-share a one or more common frequency band.

20 In FIGs. 3 A, B, there is shown a simulated example to illustrate the working of the new telemetry system through thin tubes.

FIG. 3A shows the simulated amplitude versus source 25 frequency for a peak-to-peak displacement of 0.3 mm generated by a piston of 2.5 inch diameter generating pressure waves in a water filled tube. The upper solid curve 301 represents the case of a 1 inch inner diameter tube and the lower dashed curve 302 represents a 2-inch tube. The 30 amplitude is measured in Pa and the frequency in Hz. The amplitude in the larger tube is significantly lower. The acoustic power produced by such a system is around 2W at

30Hz. Assuming a source efficiency of 0.25, the electrical power required to generate the wave signal is less than 10W, and, hence, within the limits of the amount of power that can be stored or generated at a down-hole location.

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FIG. 3B shows the simulated attenuation coefficients in decibels (dB) per 1000 ft versus frequency for coiled tubing with 1-inch (solid curve 303) and 2-inch (dashed curve 304) inner diameters. As the diameter decreases the attenuation increases leading to a higher attenuation in the 1-inch tubing. However with a wave amplitude of 30psi is generated at 25Hz in a 1" tubing, a loss of 15dB over a depth of 10000 feet would provide more than 5psi signal amplitude on surface.

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The attenuation can be high for very thin tubes such as a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hydraulic control line (3mm inner diameter). However, for a low data rate application in a low noise environment, such as well monitoring, a very low frequency at around 1-5 Hz may be used to reduce attenuation. Since the tube is thin, high signal amplitude can be generated even at low frequencies (as demonstrated in FIG. 3A), thus sufficient signal to noise ratio can be achieved on the surface.

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The above apparatus and method is particularly advantageous when applied to a well stimulation operation such as acidizing or fracturing. For these operations it is often desirable to have a flexible and readily deployable method of measuring data at a predetermined location in the well and transmitting the measured data to a surface location.

If for example an existing well requires stimulation, the operation can be started as illustrated by FIG. 5 by first lowering from the surface a small-diameter coiled tubing with the measurement and telemetry sub as described in FIG.

5 1. When the sub reaches the target depth, an acoustic channel is established in step 41 by filling the coiled tubing with water or any other low-loss liquid. The acoustic source is activated in the following step 42 and measured data such as temperature and pressure are encoded and

10 transmitted as a modulated wave signal to the surface receivers where it is demodulated and filtered to recover the original data (step 43).

In a fracturing operation the operator can then start

15 pumping the fracturing fluids and proppants as required from the surface (step 44). It will be appreciated that the acoustic channel through the coiled tubing is not affected by the stimulation operation and can continue to be used as telemetry system to monitor the down-hole conditions during

20 the whole and after completing the stimulation (step 45).

In a final step of the operation the coiled tubing is retrieved.

25 While the invention has been described in conjunction with the exemplary embodiments described above, many equivalent modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art when given this disclosure. Accordingly, the exemplary embodiments of the invention set forth above

30 are considered to be illustrative and not limiting. Various changes to the described embodiments may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.